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THE NEIGHBORHOOD IN SOCIAL RECONSTRUCTION

ROBERT A. WOODS
South End House, Boston

The institution of the family existed before there was any human nature. It was not humanity which created the family, but in a real sense the family created humanity.

Now the neighborhood is a still more ancient and fundamentally causative institution than the family. It seems likely that the neighborhood, in the shape of gregarious association among the animals, was the necessary matrix in which the subtle reciprocities of the family could find suggestion and protection. Such groups developed really organic quality, as each of them became a "family of families." The clan and the early village community were the dynamic source out of which the foundation principles of all the more broadly organized social forms have been developed.

It is, I believe, one of the most important and one of the most slighted considerations affecting all the social sciences, that the neighborhood relation has a function in the maintenance and progress of our vast and infinitely complicated society today which is not wholly beneath comparison with the function which it exercised in the creative evolution of that society. But there are today signs of a wholly new emphasis, both theoretical and practical, upon the function of the neighborhood as affecting the whole contemporary social process.

The peculiar disregard of the neighborhood in the theoretical and practical counsels of statesmanship, and of the non-governmental administration of society, is to be traced largely to the psychological attitude of social students and social administrators. Once three eminent geographers—Elisee Reclus, Kropotkin, and Patrick Geddes—were engaged in conversation when the question was raised, “If you go to the bottom of your mind, what is the resultant conception of the world which you find there?” They all agreed that it was the one which had been determined by the four-square Mercator’s projection-maps in the little textbooks which they had first studied. Is it not true that in all social studies our minds are inevitably conventionalized by the constant dominance over them, during the whole period of education, of those particular social institutions which are in more or less crystallized form, whose sanctions are obvious and unavoidable, and which project themselves in large and somewhat distant terms? Have we in sociology really passed the stage represented in medicine by the discovery of the circulation of the blood? If so, how far have we come in the study of society to the microscopic observational analysis of ultimate cell life and of germ cultures, as contrasted with the discredited diagnosis of large-scale symptoms?

Aside from any claim of the neighborhood based on past social evolution, it presents the highest contemporary elements of value from the point of view of a developed scientific method, whether theoretical or applied. The neighborhood is large enough to include in essence all the problems of the city, the state, and the nation; and in a constantly increasing number of instances in this country it includes all the fundamental international issues. It is large enough to present these problems in a recognizable community form, with some beginnings of social sentiment and social action with regard to them. It is large enough to make some provision for the whole variety of extra-family interests and attachments, which in the fully developed community are ever more and more obscuring the boundary line that closes the family in upon itself. It is large enough so that the facts and forces of its public life, rightly considered, have significance and dramatic compulsion; so that its totality can arrest and hold a germinating public sense.

On the other hand, it is small enough to be a comprehensible and manageable community unit. It is in fact the only one that is comprehensible and manageable; the true reason why city administration breaks down is that the conception of the city breaks down. The neighborhood is concretely conceivable; the city is not, and will not be except as it is organically integrated through its neighborhoods.

Everybody knows that the battle for sound democratic government, as a battle, is still an affair of sharpshooters and raiders. The center of the army and the rear detachments are not yet engaged. But this great majority is consciously, keenly, and, up to a certain point, successfully, involved in the democratic administration of neighborhood affairs. The neighborhood is the vital public arena to the majority of men, to nearly all women and to all children; in which every one of them is a citizen, and many of them, even among the children, are statesmen—as projecting and pushing through plans for its total welfare. It is in the gradual public self-revelation of the neighborhood—in its inner public values, and in its harmony of interest with the other neighborhoods—that the reverse detachments of citizenship are to be swung into the battle of good municipal administration and good administration of cultural association in the city at large; it is this process which will turn the balance definitely and decisively in the direction of a humanized system of politics, of industrialism, and of morality.

I am inclined to think that on the whole there is a certain dignity in the sentiment of the neighborhood about itself which is not equaled in fact by any of our other forms of social self-consciousness. The family may be abject; the neighborhood is never so. The city may admit itself disgraced; the neighborhood always considers disgrace foisted upon it. The nation may have its repentant moods; the university and the church may be apologetic under attack; but the neighborhood will tolerate no criticism from without and little from within.

This strong and sometimes exaggerated sense of collective self-respect brings it about that neighborhood leadership, so far as neighborhood affairs are concerned, and if it is to be real and continuous leadership of the people, must be on a basis both of equality

and of honest dealings. The local boss, however autocratic he may be in the larger sphere of the city with the power which he gets from the neighborhood, must always be in and of the local people; and he is always very careful not to try to deceive the local people so far as their distinctively local interests are concerned. It is hard to fool a neighborhood about its own neighborhood affairs.

A neighborhood is a peculiarly spontaneous social group. It represents life at all points of human relations, not life on the basis of a few subjective ideas. Its collective sentiment is wrought out of a variety of emotions that have not been generalized and abstracted, and therefore go as directly and certainly into action as those of a normal child. It is not a smooth, cut and dried scheme, fashioned by imitation; but a drama full of initiative and adventure. Every day in a neighborhood is a new day. Here social action is discovered out in the open, under full cry. The crowd psychology, the mysterious currents in popular sentiment, which we from time to time can study telescopically in the larger horizon, are in essence constantly alert in the neighborhood.

The neighborhood is the most satisfactory and illuminating form of the social extension of personality, of the interlacing and comprehensive complex of the interplay of personalities; the social unit which can by its clear definition of outline, its inner organic completeness, its hair-trigger reactions, be fairly considered as functioning like a social mind.

Modern conditions of industrial specialization, the mobility of population, and easy intercommunication have brought a degree of disintegration to neighborhood life; but with the exception of some of the downtown sections of the great cities, this disintegration has not proceeded so far as is ordinarily thought. The time has come for a great renewal of confidence in the vitality of the neighborhood as a political and moral unit. Disorganized neighborhoods must by a great and special effort be reconstructed. These and all other neighborhoods which have lost their responsible leadership must by motives of patriotic adventure be provided with such a transfusion of civic blood as will lead to a thorough quickening of the functions of "the family of families." And all normally conditioned local communities must be inspired to the rediscovery

in modern terms and under modern standards of achievement of their latent collective energies.

It happens here as in medical science that discoveries are made under the appeal and threat of disease; but the results of experiments with untoward conditions have their great use not in the cure or even in the prevention of specific degeneracy but in the promotion and exaltation of the general, normal well-being. The new meaning of the neighborhood as developed at four hundred settlement houses which have sprung up in America during this generation, will find its fulfilment in the next in a national movement for a new synthesis of neighborhood well-being and productive power.

From the point of view of the transfer of social leadership from one local community to another, one of the most striking facts about the neighborhood is that, though it is essentially an intimate circle, it is at bottom always a hospitable one, always ready to receive new recruits. The first impact of a new arrival may be chilling, but in due time the newcomer begins almost automatically to go through the degrees of this greatest and freest of human free-masonries. As Mark Twain has suggested, when a man sits down beside you in the railroad car, your first feeling is one of intrusion; but after a little something happens to make your being in the same seat a matter of common interest, and the feeling of recoil dissolves into a continuous friendly glow.

It is surely one of the most remarkable of all social facts that, coming down from untold ages, there should be this instinctive understanding that the man who establishes his home beside yours, by that very act begins to qualify as an ally of yours and begins to have a claim upon your sense of comradeship. Surely this deeply ingrained human instinct is capable of vast and even revolutionary results. Among the unexplored and almost undiscovered assets upon which we must depend for the multiplication of wealth and well-being in the future, may it not be that here in the apparently commonplace routine of our average neighborhoods is the pitch blende out of which, by the magic of the applied social science that is to come, a new radium of economic and moral productive resource will be elicited?

From this point of view, the science of the community needs its neighborhood laboratories as one of its most essential resources. Nearly all highly educated persons are snatched out of neighborhood experience at an early age, and few of us ever really have it again. Thus our opportunity for the experimental, pragmatic study of typical human relations is lost—lost so far that in most cases we forget that we are suffering loss. Neighborhood impulse is one of the great values of life as to which we forget that we have ever forgotten. As our positive interchange is almost exclusively confined to the one-sixth of the population of our cities and towns which make the professional and commercial classes—that is the unsettled and unneighborly classes—we are inclined to think of the neighborhood as offering little more challenge to scientific inquiry than our almost faded out neighbor remembrances would suggest. It is in fact necessary that social science as now organized should have a change of heart, a real conversion, as to the endless intellectual interest and inexhaustible capacity for a better social order which lies in neighborhood life everywhere.

As has been suggested, the principal forms of effort leading to neighborhood research lie in experiments directed positively toward the better organization of more or less disintegrated neighborhoods, and conducted chiefly under initiative coming in the first instance from without. The distinguishing watchword of such effort is participation. It is in the hands of persons who live continuously in the neighborhood, and who let whatever of leadership they may have take the sporting chances of winning approval and response from the people of the neighborhood. As the force of neighborhood workers grows, it comes to represent both the line and the staff, the different grades of general administrative officers and the specialists in the different ways of service. There are two contrasted but mutually related ways of attack—first, an ascending scale of more or less formal classes and clubs, beginning with the mothers' prenatal class and reaching up into adult years; and secondly, a great variety of informal effort, principally in the way of visiting up and down the front streets, the side streets, and the back streets—going out into the highways and the hedges—beginning at the outer circumference of the neighborhood and working toward the center.

The more obvious common interests to be developed and directed fall under three main heads: health, vocation, recreation.

The fact that no modern city has yet proved its capacity to reproduce its own population; that one-half of each generation dies before it matures into productive power; that two of the greatest of all the economic wastes are found in infant mortality and child morbidity—comes home to the neighborhood worker in terms of a direct personal human challenge. The proper care and feeding of infants; the development of medical inspection and nursing in connection with the public schools; the local organization of the campaign against tuberculosis; the securing of public baths, gymnasiums, and playgrounds; the provision of country vacations for the children and young people of congested city quarters; and the insistent development of housing reform—as definite forms of action toward the enhancement of public health—had many of their inevitable beginnings in connection with this motive of neighborhood reorganization; and their progress depends largely upon its continuous, first-hand, intensive contacts. In fact it is historically true that the constructive motive as to the public health is of recent date, and until the last two or three decades nothing really substantial was done by public health authorities in our cities, except by a sort of spasm immediately after an epidemic. The raising of the banner of a human way of life in the poorest and meanest byways of our cities, by persons of intelligence and resource who are themselves actually encountering such serious sanitary evils through dwelling in the midst of them—this has had much to do with bringing about the present great movement of continuous and exhaustive public hygiene in our cities.

It must be remembered that this mighty enterprise, which has already accomplished so much for the human race, for the widest dissemination of practical knowledge as to the care and enhancement of health, cannot accomplish and hold its result unless it reach every doorstep and every fireside. Particularly since the collapse of the institutional method for the upbringing of neglected children, and the return to the problem of reconstructing rather than abolishing even the low-grade family life, it has been seen that very important new responsibilities are to be laid upon average and

under-average mothers in relatively resourceless neighborhoods; and that there must be an efficiently led neighborhood system by which those mothers shall be trained and held to their task; that a neighborhood sentiment and a neighborhood gossip must be created and steadily maintained which shall make these mothers in some degree at least mentally and morally equal to the service which civilization must lay upon them.

Another of the greatest wastes is in the loss of productive power through the lack of vocational training. Place a group of earnest young men and women who have themselves received the best and most complete training for life which their times afford, in a neighborhood where the great majority of the children end their educational experience without any sort of training for livelihood, and are thrown helpless out into the confusing currents of a great city's activities—and you soon find a group of intense and restless advocates of the vocational extension of our public-school system. The powerful tendency in this direction throughout the country is owing not a little to just such experiences; and the growing realization on the part of working-class parents of the necessity of such education—as shown in the marked change of front recently made upon this subject by organized labor—is the result in an equal degree of the activity of the local social workers.

Supposing it to be true that 15 per cent of the new generation at the most is now receiving some sort of adequate training for the intelligent productive work of life, one of the greatest of all present social tasks is to bring it about that the next 15 per cent shall have its appropriate opportunity for such training. In such effort, as Professor Marshall has pointed out, lies one of the most hopeful avenues for the rapid increase of national wealth. And the bringing it about, the proper encouragement of parents, the proper launching of these youth upon their vocational careers must come in the first instance at least through effectively organized neighborhood relationships.

The social recreation of young people is in every sort of community a problem of anxious significance; but where the home and the neighborhood have lost their coherence, it is beset continually with moral tragedy. A study of the problem of the young working

girl which the National Federation of Settlements has been conducting for the past two years,¹ whose results represent the collated evidence of 2,000 social workers, brings out very clearly the fact that as soon as the young girl wage-earner finds that she cannot have in her own neighborhood a satisfying reaction from the strain of work, she is carried by the essential forces of her being into a veritable ambush of moral danger. As President Lowell has suggested in urging the freshmen dormitories, the recreations of youth lose their danger when they are associated with one's normal conditions and relationships; they become ominous when they have to be sought apart from the normal way of life. It is precisely so with young people everywhere. Some of the best social service of today is being rendered by residents of settlements, who enter wholeheartedly with young working people into a really vital program of enjoyment within the immediate circle of neighborly acquaintance. These leaders thus acquire an authority from within which enables them, with full and free consent, to establish a better standard, and a still better, for social custom and for personal behavior. To those who know how the fundamental sexual morality of our cities often seems to be trembling in the balance, the value of such a method can hardly be stated in terms too strong or too broad; and it depends upon as close a study, and as persistent and exhaustive a practice, of neighborhood sociology as the most expert local politician can make in his way and for his purpose.²

The most significant new phase of the policy of our various semi-public and public institutions for the care of the sick and of the morally delinquent is in their system of so-called social service, or "follow-up" work, through which a patient or inmate is once more, by a marked exercise of persistence and skill on the part of special field officers, integrated into the life of his local community.

¹ *Young Working Girls*, edited by Robert A. Woods and Albert J. Kennedy. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1913.

² Professor T. N. Carver, of the community organization section of the national Department of Agriculture, says that it is now clear that the economic prosperity of the farmer, instead of making him and his family satisfied to remain upon the farm, only the sooner leads them to move to a town or city. Neighborhood cultural organization in the open country thus appears to be not merely a matter of sentimental interest but of the most substantial national concern.

This means the creation of a network of local influences into which the physical or moral convalescent can be sympathetically received, through which the chance of his again falling out of a normal scheme of life may be greatly lessened.

Such effort adds point, and provides technical stimulus and suggestion, in the neighborhood, toward making such a network effective as a weir in which to catch cases on their way to physical or moral decline; and beyond that toward creating a complete and powerful system of positive up-building forces in the neighborhood, affecting every phase of life from infancy onward, which will more and more lay aside the merely preventive motive in favor of that which demands the largest and richest fulfilment of life.

It is through the emergence of such interests in their neighborhood phase that a plexus of ties is gradually created which traverses all the cleavages of racial and religious distinction. We need always to remember—and we certainly do not often remember it in the right connection—that in this country we have in an increasingly large proportion of our cities and towns a bewildering complication of all the problems of political and industrial democracy, together with all the problems of cosmopolitanism. Those issues coming out of racial instinct which other nations meet on their frontiers, or at least at arms' length, we find at the very center of our intensest community life. The continual experience of finding that efforts to unite well-meaning citizens upon programs of public welfare and progress are so easily thwarted by the crafty use of racial and religious appeals is only a single index of the absolute patriotic necessity of finding a genuine foundation upon which solid unity of interest and action can be built up. Here the neighbor instinct again demonstrates its priceless value as the cement of twentieth century democracy; but not when left to itself, for here more than ever is necessary the infusion of a type of neighborhood leadership which represents American economic, political, and moral standards. It would be only too easy for the neighbor sentiment to bring about a kind of assimilation among immigrants which would be only a foreign composite, hardly nearer to American standards than were its original constituents.

Under enlightened and patriotic American leadership, every

phase of immigrant culture is not only respected but fostered; but the different immigrant types are gradually brought together on the basis of common hygienic, vocational, and recreative interests, through multiplex forms of friendly and helpful association day after day, year after year—until such neighborhood relations begin to constitute in themselves an underlying current of conviction which no ordinary appeal to ancient prejudice can disturb, and upon which the incentives of civic and national patriotism can begin surely to rely.

Such an influence provides for the immigrant that welcome of which he has dreamed; shelters his children from the vicious allurements against which he often cannot protect them; brings forth for local public appreciation the skill of hand, the heirlooms, the training in native music or drama, which the different types of immigrants have brought with them; makes special efforts to prevent the parents, and particularly the mothers, from falling behind their children in the process of Americanization—thus holding together the fabric of all that is best in the immigrant home, while patiently integrating it into the common local relationships.

Three things may be suggested at this point with regard to the general problem of immigration.

1. All such effort as has been outlined is made extremely difficult and sometimes temporarily impossible by the flooding of neighborhoods with constant new streams of immigrants.

2. The intelligently directed neighborhood process can easily be made the most effective way in which their present and future value to the nation can be determined.

3. Whatever may be said about the restriction of immigration, there is no question but that the one policy after the immigrants have arrived is to train them in our standard of living; and that for this purpose, the wisely directed neighborhood process is an absolutely indispensable resource.

Out of such effort today is coming a real emergence of democratic communal capacity. Directly or indirectly as the result of settlement work, there are springing up in the working-class districts of some of our largest cities local improvement societies in which the vital germ of nascent democratic achievement is brought about

—a civic result which is worth more, so far as these people are concerned, than would be the universal mastery on their part of all the manuals of constitutional government.

The initial strategy in promoting these organizations is a simple one. It is found that, if no other form of general response can be secured, it is always possible to get people to grumble. They are encouraged to complain about defects in the local municipal service. The complaints are then classified, and those which are most general are made the basis of a common expression. This common expression is then drawn out into some specific piece of common action. By the time such action has accomplished the desired result, there has come about a single complete experience and achievement of citizenship which marks the dawning of a downright civic consciousness.

The repetition of such experiences—the discovery that democracy is not merely repressive but constructive in tangible terms; that it properly calls not merely for honesty but for serviceability of administration; that its tangible benefits come equally to all on the same terms—all this constitutes a vital adventure through which a group of neighbors actually taste blood in the matter of citizenship; its sting, its virus becomes a part of their life from that time on.

In political democracy we have a system of co-operation in the great total, which began with the socially microscopic neighborhood unit. The entire succession of utopian social solutions—leaving out of account the last two or three decades when crude conceptions of urban mechanism and flat nationality have dominated them—has always centered in the ideal local community. There is good ground for considering the settlement as being a scientific and more actual project than that of Fourier,¹ for instance, for ultimately, more effectively, and more conclusively accomplishing what Fourier was hitting out at. Certain phases of the organization of labor, the Knights of Labor for example, have undertaken a formation subject to the lines of the local community. Syndicalism today seems to be returning to the same emphasis. It is true, of course,

¹ Brook Farm, in which George William Curtis, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Charles A. Dana, and others were interested, was founded upon the teachings of Fourier.

that co-operation in England and on the continent has built largely upon the affiliation of local neighborhood, and in turn devotes much attention to cultivating such affiliations. These references are made particularly by way of suggesting that if, as many good observers believe, we are to see in this country a new and rapid growth of experiment toward economic co-operation, these communities in which a vital and achieving neighborhood consciousness has already been aroused, will be the most likely soil in which this seed shall germinate and bear fruit. The success of co-operation in England, and its failure thus far here, are commonly laid to the homogeneity of the one people and the lack of it in the other. The achievement of sound neighborhood assimilation among us will surely go far toward bringing such experiments within our range.

One of the most striking aspects of the presence of mental dark spots with regard to the neighborhood as the least common multiple, from the point of view of the home, and the greatest common divisor, from the point of view of the state, is the almost total lack of the compilation and publication of statistical information about it. Considering the vast effort and expense involved in the collection of statistics covering births, mortality, disease, defectiveness, crime, sanitation, housing, industries, occupation, incomes, nationality, etc., it is really a tragic form of negligence that such facts are not everywhere compiled and graphically set forth so as to point the finger of fate at actual conditions from block to block. As the constructive neighborhood sense grows, it will certainly insist that such precise specifications be laid before it, with the result that the collective power of neighborhoods will be greatly stimulated and developed.

Such a disclosure, minute on the one hand, so far as each neighborhood is concerned, but comprehensive and exhaustive for cities and states, will for the first time present the real pattern in which the municipality and the commonwealth, as total fabrics put together out of interlacing neighborhoods, will begin to work out large human projects in their true lights and shades, and in their delicate adjustments of proportion and perspective. It would be hard to overestimate the importance of such results to city planning. Sociology as an art, no less than as a science, must find its primary

essential data in the fully understood neighborhood—building organically from the neighborhood, up to the nation. Aside from political action, this same ascendant synthesis must be worked out in terms of voluntary association even more subtly and exhaustively for purposes of advancing social welfare. Here such federations as were first organized in our cities for purposes of scientific charity, and those which with an ampler and more positive program are forming among the settlement houses of some of our cities are foreshadowing something of the value of the objects, and the interest of the technique, which a properly worked out federation of the neighborhoods of a city would have. The settlement federations, gathering up in an increasing degree the indigenous interests of the tenement-house neighborhoods of the city, proceed to eliminate wasteful competition of effort, to bring different specialties of service up to the best standard reached by any of the houses, to secure experts in different forms of service and send them from neighborhood to neighborhood, to classify local needs that are common to all the neighborhoods and make them the basis of a presentation of ascertained facts to be acted upon by the city government or the state legislature, and to bring out into the broader life of the city the average citizens of the less resourceful local sections.

In one city there is a United Improvement Association with delegates from some eighteen local improvement organizations, including both the downtown and the suburban sections. This organization is gradually coming to have much of the influence of a branch of the city government, with the important qualification that membership in it is by definition restricted to men who have won their right to membership in it by neighborhood social service. The sociological type of federation goes experimentally through the actual hierarchy of the social organism, from the family, through the neighborhood, the larger district, up to the city and the state—it rediscovers what precise functions belong to each in and of itself, what functions the neighborhoods perform for the city through acting by themselves, and what functions they can render for it as for themselves only by broad forms of thoroughly organized team play covering the city or state as a whole.

There are two of our great institutions which, roused by the

results of experiment in neighborhood reorganization, are beginning to awaken to the great national possibilities of a quickened neighborhood spirit, freshened down to date. The public school in some of our states is being developed into a rendezvous for every form of local community interest; and a specialized force is beginning to be organized for the necessary and responsible leadership in such enterprise. The church social service commissions, which have now been organized in not fewer than thirty-five different divisions of the Christian church—though somewhat inclined to issue judgments upon broad economic problems which had better be left to experts in such matters—are coming to realize that the churches possess an inconceivably valuable asset for social reconstruction in that they have in every local community throughout the land a building equipment and a group of people who, as a matter of fact, are already solemnly pledged to work with everyone in the community for the well-being and progress of the community as a whole. The spread of the conception—and it is spreading rapidly—that the local church exists not for itself but for its community—that the minister must find in his congregation not his field but his force—that the best and strongest people in each local congregation must be sent freely out into the open community there to work out vows of service in full co-operation with persons coming from other congregations and with men of good will apart from any church connection—will give a new complexion to many of the most anxious problems of social democracy.